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ABSTRACT

Expanding on the notion that resources exist with which the Black community can solve its problems, two questions are addressed. What characteristics enable Black families to resist the destruction of family functioning? How can such characteristics be translated into programs designed to help Black families with such problems as poor academic achievement and teenage pregnancy? A selected review of the literature on family strengths and Black families suggests seven traits fundamental to a definition of strength in Black families. Supporting previous findings, a study examining the characteristics of 50 stable and successful Black families indicated that these families typically had a strong economic base, a strong achievement orientation, an adaptability of roles, a high degree of religious orientation, a strong kinship bond, coping capabilities, love, resourcefulness, community involvement, and family unity. These characteristics suggest that human service workers developing programs for Black families should consider five basic principles: empower client families, address the diversity of types of Black families, provide choices to families, teach family members how to use processes of problem solving and conflict resolution, and set high standards for families. (RH)

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SEARCHING FOR THE STRENGTHS OF BLACK FAMILIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

We are very pleased to be able to celebrate with you and to share with you some of our concerns regarding how to strengthen the role and function of Black families. Your conference theme, "Black Families: Confronting the Challenges," is most appropriate and timely, given the current shifts in social policies and programs as well as in political ideologies and values in our society. These shifts can be seen in the academic literature and the popular media such as magazines, movies, and television.

Earlier this year, Bill Moyers produced a documentary on CBS-TV entitled, "The Vanishing Family -- Crisis in Black America" (Shales, 1986). He cited statistics on teenage pregnancy rates, the percent of children born out of wedlock, the percent of children raised in poverty, etc., and he interviewed the teen mothers and some fathers. He was able to show how the Black family is falling apart. In fact, he depicted these families as being typical of Black families. This documentary showed how irresponsible Black fathers can be by focusing on one father, Timothy. We are concerned that such documentaries project a Black culture where mothers and their children are defined as the typical Black families, where fathers don't count or are totally irresponsible, and where the "street" is viewed as the strongest component of the culture. The movie, "The Color Purple," also projected a very negative image of Black family life (Milloy, 1986). The father, who was called "Mister," had a destructive

impact on his family. Yet we know that "Mister" is real in some Black families.

In an article entitled, "Origin of the Underclass," Lemann (1986) described why Black urban ghettos are poorer, have a higher incidence of family disorganization, and are more isolated today than they have ever been. He argued that the flight of middle class Blacks from the ghettos has left an isolated underclass -- one formed less by welfare or a lack of jobs than by its folk-oriented southern Black culture. In other words, Lemann concluded, Black culture is responsible for the dysfunctional Black family. This is another way of blaming the victim for his problem and also of labeling a whole culture pathological. Howard and Hammond (1985) in their article, "Rumors of Inferiority: The Hidden Obstacles to Black Success," raised some of the same issues, but suggested different approaches to solving the problems which had been identified. They argued that the condition of American Blacks today is worse or getting worse than it is for other American racial and ethnic groups. They acknowledged that racism, discrimination, and oppression are at the root of many of these problems confronting American Blacks, but they believe that Black people have the resources to manage their own circumstances effectively. According to Howard and Hammond (1985):

The progress of any group is affected not only by public policy and by the racial attitudes of society as a whole, but by that group's capacity to exploit its own strengths. Our concern is about factors that prevent Black Americans from using those strengths.

In this paper, we hope to expand on the notion that there are resources which the Black community can marshal to solve its own

problems. One such resource is strong and viable Black families. The questions to be addressed in this presentation are as follows: 1) What characteristics enable Black families to resist the destruction of family functioning? and 2) How can we translate these traits into programs designed to help Black families with problems such as poor academic achievement and teenage pregnancy? We hope to answer these questions by reviewing the literature on family strengths and Black families, and by reporting on a research project entitled Stable Black Families (Gary, Beatty, Berry, Price, 1983).

Attributes of Strong Families

Most studies of family life in our society have tended to focus on problems, that is, the weaknesses of families. One reason for this emphasis is that the major purpose of research is to find out what has gone wrong so that ways and means can be devised to correct the problem identified. As a result, we know a lot about what is wrong with families, but little about what is right with families. In 1963, Herbert Otto wrote:

Although the professional literature is replete with criteria for identifying "problem families" and criteria useful in the diagnosis of family problems or family disorganization, little is known about how we might identify a "strong family." Sound research into the dynamics of the so-called healthy or normal family is minimal.

It is important for us to understand how both strong and weak families function as they deal with normative events and unexpected crises in their lives.

Family researchers have various conceptualizations of family strengths, with some emphasizing resources such as adaptability and integration (Burr, 1973; Young, 1953) and other qualities

which contribute to successful marriage and family relationships (Pollack, 1953). Some typical attributes of strong families identified by these family researchers are: love and understanding; a balance of independence and interdependence; clear generational boundaries; role flexibility; an ability to foster growth and development of family members; altruism; spirituality; shared power; and positivism (Otto, 1963; Pollack, 1953; Pratt, 1976). Nick Stinnett, the chairman of the Human Development and Family Development Department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and head of the annual family conference there, has conducted several regional and national studies of strong families. Through his research, Stinnett (1977) was able to identify six qualities that appear to be significant factors contributing to the strengths and happiness of families: 1) showing appreciation toward each other; 2) the ability to deal with a crisis in a positive manner; 3) spending time together; 4) having a high degree of commitment to the family; 5) good communication patterns; and 6) a high degree of religious orientation. In contrast to Stinnett, who surveyed families, Delores Curran (1983) sent questionnaires to professionals who worked with families and asked them to identify traits which they thought were characteristic of strong families. Her analysis showed that healthy families exhibit 15 traits. In her view, a healthy family: 1) communicates and listens; 2) affirms and supports its members; 3) teaches respect for others; 4) develops a sense of trust; 5) has a sense of play and humor; 6) exhibits a sense of shared responsibility; 7) teaches a sense of right and wrong; 8) has a strong sense of family in which rituals and

traditions abound; 9) has a balance of interaction among its members; 10) has a shared religious core; 11) respects the privacy of its members; 12) values service to others; 13) fosters family table time and conversation; 14) shares leisure time; and 15) admits to and seeks help with problems.

Black Family Strengths

Billingsley (1968) and Hill (1972) are, perhaps, the forerunners in emphasizing family strengths in the analysis of Black families. In this regard, Billingsley (1968) used the construct "opportunity screens" as the key to survival and stability of strong Black families. These opportunity screens or attributes of strong Black families included the following: 1) a set of family values; 2) a religious conviction and behavior; 3) educational aspiration and achievement; 4) economic security and property ownership; 5) kinship bonds or ties; and 6) community involvement. Analyzing and interpreting census data, Hill (1972) was able to identify five strengths found in Black families: 1) a strong kinship bond; 2) a strong work orientation; 3) an adaptability of family roles; 4) a strong achievement orientation; and 5) a strong religious orientation. Both Billingsley and Hill's research made a significant contribution to our understanding of Black family stability and strengths, but they did not provide adequate empirical evidence to support their respective proposition.

Other family researchers have been able to document empirically that the family strengths identified by Hill and Billingsley were indeed present in many Black families. For example, in a study of 100 low-income rural families in Alabama,

Christopherson (1977) found three strengths were prevalent: 1) a love for children (family values, kinship bond; 2) a general acceptance of children born out of wedlock (kinship bond, family values; and 3) coping capacity -- resilience which allowed them to cope with negative forces (religious orientation, role flexibility). In another major study, Scanzoni (1971) used a sample of 400 Black households which included both husband and wife. With this urban sample, he described and analyzed relationships the respondents had as adolescents with their parents and with other adults, parental socialization, husband-wife interaction, and the relationship between family of origin history and current family behavior. The major factors which were found to contribute to the stability of Black families in this study were as follows: 1) economic and social advantages as well as employment opportunities provided by living in the city; 2) social status obtained from religious involvement, parental presence in the home, and the number of children; 3) the ability to provide economic, social, and educational resources for children in the family; 4) role models for children in the community (i.e., a school teacher, a minister, etc.); 5) the quality of the husband-wife relationship; and 6) the level of interaction between parent and child.

Royce and Turner (1980) also conducted a study in Dayton, Ohio to examine the strengths of Black families that had been identified by Hill (1972) and others. Using census tract data to identify those areas with the highest concentration of Blacks, they randomly selected 128 persons to be interviewed. Their findings tended to validate the family strengths identified by

Hill and revealed other strengths as well, such as: 1) teaching children to respect themselves; 2) teaching children how to be happy; 3) stressing cooperation within the family; and 4) disciplining children. Other researchers (Heiss, 1975; McAdoo, 1978; Stack, 1974) have demonstrated from empirical research the viability of Black kinship networks and delineated how well these families have been able to carry out certain functions. For example, Martin and Martin (1978), McAdoo (1978), and Stack (1974) have documented the use of kinship ties as a resource for carrying out a number of important functions such as role modeling, socialization, mutual aid, and value clarification. Moreover, McAdoo (1978) has shown that these kinship ties transcend class boundaries. In her study of middle class Black families, she found that the kinship-help pattern among persons from such families was strong even after the persons had achieved mobility within the broader society.

In this selected review of the literature on Black families, we can identify the following traits as being important or crucial in any definition or characterization of Black family strengths: 1) a strong economic base (stable employment, property ownership, a strong work orientation); 2) a high degree of religious orientation; 3) achievement orientation (educational aspiration and expectation and educational attainment); 4) the adaptability of roles (role flexibility, shared responsibility); 5) a strong kinship bond (a high degree of commitment, mutual obligations); 6) coping capabilities (an ability to deal with crises in a positive manner, helping networks and exchanges); and 7) love (an ability to affirm one another, respect others, and to appreciate

each other). These traits may not be found in all strong families to the same extent, intensity, and duration. Moreover, it is assumed that a number of factors may affect family strength and stability in Black communities. Some of these factors are as follows: 1) the age of the family head; 2) the kind of family structure; 3) marital history and behavior; 4) socio-economic status; 5) family of orientation behavior; 6) family size; 7) social transactions (formal and informal); and 8) psychological attributes of family members.

The Stable Black Family Study

This research project was based on the following assumptions: 1) We need to examine the behavior of successful Black families. We believe that learning about strong, healthy Black families (rather than focusing on weak and unhealthy Black families) can provide the necessary data for creating meaningful family development programs; 2) We need to study both men and women in family settings. In the past, family researchers have tended to focus on mothers and their children in their analyses of Black families. In fact, there was a tendency to collect information from the mother and her children regarding how the father functions in the family; moreover, we know more about the Black man's absence from his family than we know about his presence in the family; 3) We need to focus on how Black families solve problems, not just the extent of problems within these units. Families are not perfect. All families have problems; 4) Data from non-institutional sources are key to developing programs for Black families. In the past, too many family researchers have relied on secondary data sources (for example, the U.S. Census

Bureau, the U.S. Department of Labor, the welfare department, Health Department, etc.) for their analyses of Black families; and 5) A sociocultural frame of reference should be used to study Black people. With such a model, the researcher will not have to assume a uniform Black community, and it will not be necessary to use a comparative research paradigm where the question is always how Black families differ from white families. The research question might be how families differ within the context of the Black community. For example, do religious Black families behave differently from non-religious Black families? A sociocultural approach to Black family life will allow the researcher to look at a range of internal and external variables which impact on family behavior.

Fifty (50) families who lived in Washington, D.C. (26 husband-wife and 24 headed by females) were the study participants who were nominated by community groups because of their perceived strength and stability. In order to be a participant, the family had to have been together for at least five years and to have a minor child present in the home. Seventy-six (76) individual interviews--(26 husband-wife (that is, one interview with each spouse) and 24 single family (that is female householders)--were conducted to obtain information on the families' respective socio-economic characteristics, level of participation in neighborhood and organizational activities, daily routines, talent and skills, religiosity, problems experienced, and coping strategies.

Once the nominations were received from the organizations, individual interviews with husbands and wives and the female

householders were scheduled through telephone contacts. Staff members and other experienced interviewers administered the questionnaire. Each interview averaged two to three hours in length. Data analyses included frequency counts, percentages, means, and scale scores. The identification of family strengths was obtained from three sources -- the community informants, the interviewers, and the families themselves. This paper will examine only the data from the informant and the respondent sources.

Community informants were asked to state the reasons they nominated the families referred for participation in the study. A list of attributes (that is, characteristics of strong families compiled from the literature) was provided to the informants who utilized it for identifying the criteria used in selecting the families. The informants were also encouraged to use their own criteria. Table 1 contains the reasons cited for the nomination. The most common reasons cited by the informants were that the families displayed: 1) strong kinship bonds; 2) a strong achievement orientation; 3) parenting skills in parent-child relations; 4) a strong religious - philosophical orientation; 5) an intellectual - cultural orientation; and 6) an ability to deal with crises. As can be observed in Table 1, female-headed families were more than twice as likely as were husband-wife families to be cited because of their perceived ability to deal with crises. Husband-wife families were more likely than were female-headed families to be nominated because of their love, kindness, compassion, and their ability to be supportive and caring, as perceived by the informants.

Table 1
 Characteristics Cited by Informant-Organizations
 In Identifying Stable Black Families
 (36 Organizations, 74 Families)

Characteristics	Frequency Cited ^a		
	Husband-Wife	Female Head	Total
Strong Kinship Bonds	24	16	40
Strong Achievement Orientation	14	15	29
Parenting Skills, Parent-Child Relations	16	18	34
Strong Religious-Philosophical Orientation	12	12	24
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	12	11	23
Ability to Deal with Crises	7	16	23
Strong Work Orientation	10	9	19
Independence	6	8	14
Organization	7	6	13
Active Recreational Orientation	5	7	12
Appreciation for Each Other	8	4	12
Adaptability of Family Roles	6	4	10
Self-Expression	5	5	10
Love, Kindness, Compassion	9	1	10
Supportive, Caring	7	2	9
Fit Characteristics in List Sent with Letter	7	2	9
Positive Response to Disabled/Handicapped Family Members	3	5	8
Conflict Resolution	3	4	7
Quality/Length of Marriage	5	0	5
No Reason Given	3	2	5

a. Multiple reasons were cited by each organization.

NOTE: Some organizations that used the list of characteristics enclosed in our letter either listed additional traits or selected specific traits from the list.

Respondents were asked to list the strengths of their families. (See Table 2) The most frequently cited strength of their own families was a sense of family unity (indicated by 50% or more of the married women and men as well as the single women). The next most frequent responses of married women were love, religion, sharing responsibilities, support, and coping strategies (18%, 15%, 10%, 8%, and 8%, respectively of their total number of responses). Married men indicated that love (23% of their total responses) was the second most prevalent strength in their families, followed by religion, support, and sharing responsibilities. For single women, the next most frequently cited strengths were love, sharing responsibilities (each comprised 20% of the responses), religion and support (each comprised 12% of the responses) and coping strategies (7% of the responses). There appeared to be few differences between the married men and women and the single women in their perceptions of their families' respective strengths. However, single women were twice as likely to list sharing responsibilities as a strength as well as married women or men (8 single women in comparison to 4 married men and 4 married women). In addition, married men did not list coping strategies as a strength in their families, in contrast to the responses of their mates and the single women heads of households.

From a detailed analysis of how these families function, additional strengths can be identified. For example, these families had a high level of academic achievement. As shown in Table 3, over 60% of the respondents had completed college or graduate school. However, the married couples were more likely to

Table 2

Perceived Strengths in Respondent's Family

	Married				Single Women	
	Women		Men			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Family Unity	16	41	15	43	12	29
Love	7	18	8	23	6	20
Religion	6	15	4	11	5	12
Sharing Responsibilities	4	10	4	11	8	20
Support	3	8	4	11	5	12
Coping Strategies	3	8	-	-	3	7

Percentages are based on the total number of responses given to the question.

Table 3

Selected Characteristics of Stable Black Families

Characteristics	Married				Single Women	
	Women		Men		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
School Completed						
Elementary	2	7.7	1	3.8	1	4.2
High School	8	30.8	8	30.8	10	41.7
College	10	38.5	8	30.8	7	29.2
Graduate School	6	23.1	9	34.6	6	25.0
Employment Status						
Employed	22	84.6	25	96.2	22	91.7
Unemployed	4	15.4	1	3.8	2	8.3
Home Ownership						
Own	24	92.3	-	-	11	45.8
Rent	2	7.7	-	-	13	54.2
Selected Additional Income*						
Second Job	6	23.1	8	30.8	8	33.3
Interest	5	19.2	16	61.5	5	20.8
Rental Income	3	11.5	5	19.2	1	4.2
Consultant and other	8	30.7	9	34.2	5	20.8

*Some respondents listed more than one source of additional income, while others noted that this characteristic did not apply to them. Therefore, the number of responses regarding this item--as well as the percentage of persons responding--does not always correspond to the total number of respondents who participated in this study. In addition, all percentages have been rounded.

have college and graduate school experiences than were the single women. All families included in the study had a strong work orientation. This conclusion is evidenced by the fact that 85% of the married women, 96% of the married men, and 92% of the single women were employed, and the vast majority of these respondents worked in white collar settings. Although husbands' and wives' reports of total household income varied slightly, about half of the couple families had annual family incomes of \$35,000 or more. Sixty-three (63) percent of the single women had a family income of less than \$25,000 a year. Only 2 out of 24 single women (8%) had a family income of \$35,000 a year. Table 3 shows that these families had additional sources of income which further document their strong work orientation. For example, 33.3% of single women, 30.8% of married men, and 23.1% of married women had second jobs. With these types of financial resources, it is not surprising that home ownership is highly valued by these families. Table 3 shows that 92.3% of the couple families and 45.8% of the single female families own their own homes.

When asked to indicate the "most important things about the way your immediate family gets along with each other," all the respondents agreed that helping and supporting each other, communicating respect, love, concern, and family unity were important. Men also indicated that trust and honesty were important. In comparison to all women, men were more likely to state that respect was important. Twelve (12) men-- 46.2 % of the men--gave this response, in comparison to 26% of all women. Among the women who stated that respect was important, 7 (or 29.2%) were single women and 6 (or 23.1%) were married women. Women were more

likely than were men to list helping and supporting each other as an important dynamic (11 single women and 10 married women, in comparison to 6 married men).

These stable families did experience some problems, which can be seen in Table 4. Problems with finances, marriages, and children were the most frequently cited problems by all respondents, although the extent to which these problems were experienced varied among the three groups. Single women generally reported higher rates of problems than did married women and men (except that married men reported more health problems than did women). The most frequent problem experienced by married men was marital (65.4%), while the most frequent problem experienced by women--regardless of their marital status--was financial. In this regard, 83.3% of the single women and 65.4% of the married women said their most frequent problem pertained to their finances. All respondents used discussions to solve the problems they identified. Other persons were not frequently sought for assistance in solving problems. The potency of the decision not to seek counsel from another person is revealed in the responses of the several men and single women who responded "no one" to the question, "Who helped you with this problem?" Self-reliance and self-sufficiency were highly valued by these families.

For the most part, these families had a variety of talents and skills (e.g., cooking, painting, writing, dancing, singing) which might account for their emphasis on self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Married women reported having nine talents, which were taking care of children, writing, cooking/baking, tutoring others to read, sewing/tailoring, public speaking,

Table 4

Problems Experienced by Marital Status
and Sex, Stable Black Families

Problem	Married				Single Women	
	Women		Men		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Financial	17	65.4	16	61.5	20	83.3
Children	14	53.8	14	53.8	13	54.2
Marital	14	53.8	17	65.4	18	75.0
Job/employment	8	30.8	7	26.9	10	41.7
Health	4	15.4	9	34.6	7	29.2
Emotional	5	19.2	5	19.2	6	25.0
Friends	4	15.4	7	26.9	8	33.3
Neighbors	3	11.5	4	15.4	7	29.2

performing household handy work, nursing the sick, and counseling. These women reported that their husbands had talents in 11 areas. Married men reported having 17 personal talents, including cooking, gardening, tutoring, taking care of children, painting, performing, carpentry, public speaking, fixing hair, performing general household handy work, performing autos, plumbing, completing forms, nursing the sick, writing, counseling, repairing household appliances, and performing electrical wiring. The men reported that their wives had talents in 10 areas. Single women reported that they had the following 11 talents: cooking, sewing, tutoring, taking care of children, public speaking, fixing hair, performing general household handy work, nursing the sick, completing forms, counseling, and playing musical instruments.

The kinship bonds as reflected in kin interactions and helping patterns were very strong among these families. Of the 76 respondents, 68 (89.5%) had relatives living in the Washington, D.C. area. Married women (N=11, 42.3%) and single women (N=11, 45.8%) more often talked to or saw their relatives daily or almost daily than did married men, who more often talked to or saw their relatives once a week. However, single women (N=6, 25.0%) and married men (N=6, 23.1%)--in comparison to married women (N=11, 42%)--talked to or saw their relatives living outside the local area often (once every 2 to 3 months for single women and married men and once a year for married women).

Although these families emphasized self-reliance, they did seek help from family members and these members were perceived to be helpful. When asked directly how often their families helped them out, half of the men (N=13) stated that they never needed

help from their families or that help was not needed often. When family help was received, it was usually in the form of emotional support or advice (N=14, 53.9%). When married women were asked how often their families provided help to them, nearly 40% (N=10) stated that their families helped them fairly or very often. Over half (N=15) indicated that their families provided a great deal of help when it was needed. Only one person indicated that her family was only a little helpful. Families most often provided help to married women in the following ways: providing money, giving emotional support, taking care of children, and providing household help. Six (6) of the single women (25%) stated that they did not often need help from their families. None stated that they never needed help from their families. Over half stated that their families were a great deal of help when needed. Help most often received by single women from their families was emotional support (25.0%), money (20.8%), and child care (16.7%).

These families were very involved in a variety of organizations and clubs. A large percentage of the sample population reported belonging to school organizations. Single women had the highest participation rates in these organizations (N=22, 91.7%), compared to married women (N=16, 61.5%) and married men (N=15, 57.7%). Church-related affiliations claimed the second highest participation rate among the married men (N=14, 53.8%) and single women (N=19, 79.2%). Over half of the married men (N=14, 53.8%) and 46.2% (N=12) of married women belonged to civic groups. The lowest participation rates were in social clubs for the married men (N=4, 15.4%), political groups for the married women (N=2, 7.7%), and service clubs for the single women (N=2, 8.3%).

Conclusion

The Stable Black Family study tends to support the findings of other researchers who have identified the strengths of Black families. According to our data, the following attributes are characteristic of strong Black families:

- 1) a strong economic base as reflected in stable family income, employment, property ownership, and a strong work orientation;
- 2) a strong achievement orientation (that is, a high educational expectation and attainment, high aspirations, and achievement motivation);
- 3) an adaptability of roles (that is, having role flexibility and sharing responsibility);
- 4) a high degree of religious orientation (as evidenced by church membership, church attendance, a sense of right and wrong, teaching moral values, and a shared religious core);
- 5) a strong kinship bond (for example, a high degree of commitment for the family, a feeling of mutual obligation, kin interaction, and support);
- 6) coping capabilities (an ability to deal with crises in a positive manner, helping networks and exchanges);
- 7) love (the ability to affirm one another and to respect, appreciate, and trust others);
- 8) resourcefulness (possessing personal talents, and skills; self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and independence);
- 9) community involvement (service to others, and membership and active involvement in community organizations); and
- 10) family unity (possessing a sense of cohesiveness, family, and race pride).

Human service workers need to be more sensitive to attributes of strong Black families and to design programs to promote the development of these traits in all Black families. Based on this study, workers need to identify some basic principles for developing programs for Black families. The first principle for

building a Black family program is that the program should be based on the concept of empowerment. Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as "a process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of value social roles." She believes that empowerment should not be viewed as a goal but should also be viewed as a process of intervention in working with Black clients. It is important for Black families to be taught that they should be in control of their lives. Social workers, psychologists, and teachers should not become the substitute parent.

A second principle of program development is the necessity of accepting the notion of diversity within the Black community and among Black families. Billingsley (1968) identified 12 different types of Black families. Given this reality, it is possible for each of these family types to be strong and viable. In their study of well functioning, two-parent, working class families, Lewis and Looney (1984) concluded:

Perhaps more than any other issue, this study points out the need to explore further the heterogeneity of families at a particular socio-economic level. This study demonstrates that the concept of working class two-parent Black families is such a broad description that it tells us very little.

In other words, there are different groups of families at various socio-economic levels. There are also different groups of families at various ideological and political levels. We have to develop programs which affirm the diversity in family types within the Black community.

The principle of choice, the third principle, is related to diversity. If one has a variety of family types, professionals must build choices for the participants into each family program. Families need to be taught how to insist on having choices which are consistent with their life styles and/or world view. If you provide choices in programs, you can expect some level of conflict. The fourth principle is conflict, particularly conflict resolution. Families should be helped to see both the positive and negative functions of conflict (Coser, 1956). Although conflict has positive functions (for example, it can lead to innovation, a change in relationships, etc.), emphasis should be placed on conflict resolution. Families have to be taught how to solve problems and that there are steps to the problem-solving process. In our programs, we have to show families how to create an environment where failure is not fatal. It is okay to make a mistake. Few families or programs are perfect. Families and professionals sometimes forget this.

The fifth principle is the setting of high standards. Professionals, in designing programs for Black families, should set high standards. We have to expect the best from families. We have to teach our families to establish all types of standards: social standards, academic standards, political and ideological standards, and moral standards. Furthermore, we can use role models to encourage success, and a greater emphasis should be placed on collaboration. Professionals should recognize and applaud achievement in our communities and should structure such activities in family development programs.

There are other principles for guiding the development of family programs. We should keep in mind that families and people in general are motivated by emphasizing their strengths. It is important for professionals to devote more time and attention to identifying attributes of strong Black families, and to developing strategies for translating these attributes into family programs which could benefit a large number of Black families.

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